

USDA-APHIS

TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED DURING THE
NATIONAL ANIMAL ID PROGRAM LISTENING SESSION

MACEY CENTER

NEW MEXICO INSTITUTE OF MINING AND TECHNOLOGY

SOCORRO, NEW MEXICO

FRIDAY, JULY 16, 2004 - 3:00 P.M.

IN ATTENDANCE:

BILL HAWKS

UNDER SECRETARY, MARKETING & REGULATORY PROGRAMS

DR. VALERIE RAGAN, ASSISTANT DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR

MR. MIKE TUCK, MODERATOR

(The meeting was called to order at 3:02 p.m. and opening comments were made by Mr. Bill Hawks and Dr. Valerie Ragan.)

MR. TUCK: Thank you, Valerie. I would like to describe the process that we'll be using for the public input part of the session. First, this portion is being transcribed by Jennifer Knight, sitting over here. She's talking into a mask, so don't be concerned about that. That's just the way the transcribing will be working. The transcript will be available on the APHIS home page over the next week.

Each speaker will have three minutes to provide their comments, and to help us keep on schedule, we have a timer box over here. This box will have a solid green light for the first two minutes, a flashing green light for the next 45 seconds, a flashing yellow light for 15 seconds, and then the dreaded red light comes on, which means it's time to wrap up what you're saying so we can go on to the next person.

We have eight people signed up for the session, and I'd like to bring the first five to come up here at this time. We have Mr. Wayne Klump. As soon as I call your name, please come up here. Paul Quintana, Tony Martinez, Kenneth Dierschke--and forgive me if I butcher your name. It's hard to read names and pronounce them at the same time. And also Dan Dierschke.

MR. KLUMP: I'm Wayne Klump, and I have registered brands in Arizona and New Mexico. The first thing I'd like to say is that the USDA does not have jurisdiction. The state has the brands. That's our identification. So you guys don't even have jurisdiction at all. That's--our

identification is the brands. We have brand rules to track the animals, and we already have it. I number my cattle. I brand the number on them. So that is my personal identification.

Not only do you not have jurisdiction, you don't have standing. It doesn't affect you folks any. It affects me. It's my livelihood. All you guys are planning on doing is putting me out of business. This is just one of your plans to put me out of business. I listened to you say that Japan wants it. I will suggest that you identify import cattle, foreign cattle. All of the other livestock is already identified. They're ours. They're American, and they don't need identified [sic].

USDA is not my friend. R-CALF had to sue you folks to get you to close the Canadian border. Even after you knew that BSE existed in Canada, you went ahead and opened the Canadian border. And about the talks with Japan, this is baloney. Creekstone Farms wants to--Japan demands testing, BSE testing, 100 percent. Creekstone Farms wants to do it. You won't let 'em. So, my question is, why don't you let 'em? Another question I have is, why don't you identify the elk and buffalo and wildlife?

The privacy issue. Whenever the government gets ahold of it, there's no such a thing as privacy. I respect my privacy, and I don't want you guys to know where I am or where my livestock are. That is a personal matter.

This deal about the USDA coming in for animal identification, it's unconstitutional. The Ninth and Tenth Amendment says those powers not specifically given to the government are reserved to the states and to the people. You've already given the brand to the states and us, and I don't want you anywhere around. Everything that you've ever done, you've messed up on. Just look at our forests.

MR. TUCK: Excuse me, Mr.---

MR. KLUMP: I don't want to--another bureaucracy. You say that this is gonna be minimal. You say you want to listen to what I have to say---

MR. TUCK: Your time is up--Mr. Klump, our time is up, please.

MR. KLUMP: Pardon me?

MR. TUCK: Our time is up. Three minutes.

MR. KLUMP: I listened to you for two hours. I just have a little more.

MR. HAWKS: Excuse me.

MR. KLUMP: I object to you folks spending \$18 million of my money this year and \$33 million next year. Congress ordered you to implement country of origin labeling. You haven't done that. Congress hasn't told you to do this national identification, and if you're gonna cut me off, well---

MR. TUCK: I'm sorry, but we have to allow the other people a chance. Mr. Quintana.

MR. QUINTANA: I'm Paul Quintana. I'm a producer in the Tucumcari area. I also serve on the State FSA committee. I share some of the concerns of this previous gentleman about privacy; however, I realize that in light of what's occurred we're gonna have to have some security to our country.

One of the concerns I had is, we need a program that's not burdensome to the producer. You know, as a producer having stock in the ranches, it's expensive to get them up to identify. They already have a brand. If they're gonna have some permanent--additional permanent ID, it needs to be done at the time they're shipped. So that would be one of my concerns.

Another concern is, as voluntary programs are initiated throughout the country and then are proven to be unacceptable, there's gonna be a lot of expense. Maybe some kind of modified consistency could be presented from the get-go.

And then if some system had to be established nationwide, maybe--the FSA, again, is a producer-friendly agency. It could be done through them in a way that would be--where the producers had some input into it as well to see how everything could work. Thank you.

MR. TUCK: Thank you, Mr. Quintana. Mr. Martinez.

MR. MARTINEZ: Thank you. My name is Tony Martinez. I'm a rancher, primarily cattle rancher in northeastern New Mexico in Harding County. And in a neighboring county, I'm also County Executive Director under USDA for Farm Service Agency. So I realize and I agree, we're not too--we're not too hot on the issue of animal identification, but, like Paul mentioned, it's here, it's passed by Congress, so we're gonna have to live with it.

My question, after it is implemented, what agency is--and I think, Valerie, you touched a little bit on that. It's on a trial basis with--but what agency is going to implement it? My feeling is, because as a--as a--I don't know if you want to call it as a bureaucrat, but as a federal employee, we have daily contact in FSA offices nationwide with farmers and ranchers.

And they rely on us, they trust us. I think being on the trenches and being with these farmers and ranchers on a daily basis, that the local FSA office and your counties would be the ideal agency.

And I might get my hand slapped by somebody in Washington for saying this, but would be the ideal agency to deal with it because--and I think because they come in and have daily contact with us on a weekly or monthly basis, if there's gonna be an animal ID tracking system, we can do some of that monitoring, whether it be implants, tags, or whatever, with these ranchers. We have GPS, we have farm and tract data. We have all this stuff that is technology available that gives us the right to do it.

As a livestock producer, I agree with the first gentleman. It's gonna be burdensome, and I hope that we don't place that burden on the producer, the financial burden, I'm talking about. We're used to branding our calves. We're used to shipping on them. New Mexico has one of the best branding laws, and therefore we already have our own tagging system. Thank you. I think that's all I have to say.

MR. TUCK: Thank you, Mr. Martinez. Kenneth Dierschke.

MR. DIERSCHKE: Good afternoon. My name is Kenneth Dierschke, and I serve as the president of Texas Farm Bureau, the largest agricultural organization in Texas, with 371,320 member families. A large portion of our members are livestock producers. On behalf of those producers, I want to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the National Animal Identification System. The Texas Farm Bureau is directly involved with other key groups in development of a pilot program that we expect will become a workable system for producers.

Our policy, adapted by our Farm Bureau delegates, supports the livestock identification program for the purpose of disease control, but it must be a practical, cost-effective system that is acceptable to the livestock industry.

This issue is at the forefront of the livestock producers' minds. There is a lot of misunderstanding and concern by producers as to, number one, when will the program be implemented? Number two, confidentiality of the information. Number three, cost. And fourth, producer liability.

We support a program that will begin as voluntary, with pilot projects, to work out problems that would happen as we move livestock through markets and other collection points. In order for a National ID System to work, ultimately mandatory participation by all producers will be necessary. However, it must be a system that is easily understandable and one that works without being burdensome for producers.

I know that you have heard that confidentiality is the utmost concern to producers. Protection of their information from those who would use this information to harass, ridicule, or destroy their livelihood is paramount. Unless this information is protected from the Freedom of Information Act, willful and agreeable participation in an ID system will be a major problem.

We do not believe that producers should be required to carry the burden of cost for the system alone. Any time you require mandatory participation in a program, cost should be shared by all parties involved, including the federal government.

The cost of this system is expected to run into the millions of dollars and, unfortunately, livestock producers do not have the ability to pass along these costs. Small

producers would be the most likely to be affected by this system because of the lack of facilities and equipment to tag and transfer the information to databases. Texas has approximately 18 million head of all classes of livestock, and most of these producers will own less than 50 head, so you can see that cost will be a major factor to the majority of Texas producers.

Another confusing aspect of the ID system to producers exactly is what they're supposed to do. Our understanding is that this system is designed to trace back animal disease within 48 hours of discovery. It is not intended to be used to trace food-borne illnesses back to the farm. Producers are concerned that they would be held liable for food-borne illnesses that occur after the animals have left their possession and control. This point needs amplification during the initial stages.

In closing, producer profitability must be kept in mind in designing a system. We understand that trade supports our economy, and trade often dictates parameters that countries must operate within in order to sell their products on the international market. Animal disease and trace-back capabilities of our products are some of these parameters we must continue with in today's world. We look forward to working with USDA to implement the ID system. Thank you.

MR. TUCK: Thank you.

MR. DAN DIERSCHKE: My name is Dan Dierschke. I am a rancher in central Texas. I'm here representing myself and my wife. After the funeral fires of England with the destruction of the cattle, I think many of us recognize the need for a system that will allow for rapid trace-back in the event of an animal disease outbreak so that the outbreak can be contained

with minimal damage to producers. However, as you set up your regulations we would encourage you to be as friendly to producers as possible, as I heard in your descriptions today.

We support the use of Animal ID for managing animal health disease only. We do not support the use of Animal ID when it becomes mandatory for discussion or for issues relating to food-borne illnesses, ag census, or any other purpose. We do support, on the other hand, the use of unique animal identification number for optional programs, either optional marketing programs or value-added programs as long as the information remains under the ownership of the producer and is entirely within the private sector.

As you prepare your regulations for the allocation of premise numbers, we suggest a maximum in flexibility. Either allow a producer to have one prem number for multiple locations or multiple prem numbers, depending upon his business decision.

As has been mentioned many times, we are very concerned about confidentiality. Legislation may help, but we also urge you to consider the possibility of the database being implemented in and remaining in the private sector, and that the information necessary be provided to appropriate animal health authorities only for trace-back to manage a disease outbreak.

You've also heard today concerns about product liability. We see today the trend of everyone in sight being sued whenever an incident occurs. We would suggest some type of legislation be enacted to provide immunity for those of us who have followed acceptable animal health care practices while the animals are in our control.

The number one concern I think producers have is cost. And we recognize that many of our people do not have the kind of equipment, both facilities and electronics, necessary for a sophisticated system. I encourage you to make possible the use of a paper system whereby smaller producers can give their information to a database without having to have sophisticated equipment.

The cost, we have heard many times, we suggest it should be shared, both between producers and government. We naturally recognize the benefit to us as producers to control disease outbreaks, but we also want to focus on the benefit to society, both in preservation of industries and homeland security, to have such protections in place.

I wanted to mention several other things, but I see my time is about to run out. I operate in a lot of brush country. The tags that we currently use, we have a very high loss ratio every year. I'd say 20 to 25 percent. When you write your regulations, I hope that there's some system in place whereby we can have some way of tracking those animals who have lost their ID.

And very lastly, we need information. We have too many producers out there, and the saddest case I've heard about was a man who was going to sell out simply because of the misinformation he had heard about how this program is going to be implemented. Thank you.

MR. TUCK: Thank you, Mr. Dierschke. The next speakers I'd like to come up here, please, and they are Mr. Ray Fowler, Mr. Mayfield, Lori Brewer, if she wants to speak. She said maybe.

MS. BREWER: A lot of comments are taken care of, especially with the first gentleman.

MR. TUCK: Thank you. Colleen Cowan, and Mr. Sam Houston.

MR. FOWLER: My name is Ray Fowler, and I come to represent the Fowler groups. We have three ranches. I'm not down to very many cattle, just a few of them on our deeded land, but it still concerns me about the diseases that come in all right. But I think if you control our borders, I think our diseases are pretty well under control in the United States for several years. Now, you did mention, and I'll agree, that when all the hunters come in with horses and you got more elk than you got cows in there, those diseases are not controlled by nobody.

And the rest of it's pretty much been covered, but that's my big concern is stuff from other countries coming in. If you can control that, I think we can control our own. And I think with the ear tags, there's one under every one of Smoky Bear's bushes up there on the side of that hill. We've already tried that, and they don't stay. But a brand will stay on my cow, and we've got a pretty good record. The only ones I know can ship cattle in this state without their truthful owner is the government themselves. And I think that's pretty well all I've got to say. Thank you for your time.

MR. TUCK: Thank you, Mr. Fowler. Ms. Mayfield.

MS. MAYFIELD: Thank you. I just have a few comments. I'm very proactive with the Animal ID system. I think ultimately, as mandated by the government, it is inevitable. It may take a couple of years for complete implementation, but I feel that it is a producer's

protection that we try to work together and work with the authorities that are trying to build a system that's gonna work.

I realize the cost, and the cost is scaring everyone. I believe a lot of the producers are afraid of it simply because they don't understand it. I think the education part is--the learning curve is essential. I think the producers think of a computer and database as, "Oh, my God, I don't even know how to turn on the thing, much less put in the data."

And, you know, whether or not service agencies or service groups provide that service in the field for the producers--maybe--the gentleman spoke about the FSA becoming involved in that, and that was a very good idea, in that it was a government agency and they could possibly provide that field service work for the producers. Whether or not it's at the time of branding or weaning or shipping, I guess for the premises ID, which you do have a number at that point, then that tagging process comes into play. And we--we ranch. We're cow/calf operators, and we market a lot of cattle every year, and we deal with a lot of producers that are right on the edge of trying to make decisions and trying to learn about the different options, whether or not it be an implant or a tag, which some producers feel are not too effective. Whatever your personal preference is.

I think that--I think that we need to educate and get these people online. Again, personally, we have marketed our cattle for fall delivery with the EID in place, and it seems to be that the returns are quite attractive right now. And it may be because the market stockers and feeders are looking at trying to protect themselves and have something in place so that they are compliant and they can move their cattle or their feed. At the time that--in case it becomes, you

know, sooner than later. And I think they're trying to get some systems into place so they can understand how it's gonna work best for their operation.

So, we are on line with it. We're gonna try one method, one product, if you will, and it is going into a database that does definitely have privacy. It's a database that is utilized only by the producer, and there's a password available.

And again, there are many different options on the market, but we're gonna try one and see how it's gonna work. We've invested in the software equipment and we're going to make it available to producers that we work with for just the convenience, so that they help to educate them so they can see how it really involves their part, how they can contribute. Thank you very much.

MR. TUCK: Thank you, Ms. Mayfield. Ms. Cowan.

MS. COWAN: Mr. Secretary, Valerie, it's good to see you again. We appreciate your coming to New Mexico. It was nice to have lunch with you today. I was a lot further back in the line than you guys were, but I made it anyway. My name is Caren Cowan, and I'm here today speaking on behalf of the New Mexico Cattle Grower's Association.

While we probably have members who are not supportive of an Animal ID system, most of us recognize--most of our members recognize that there's a train coming and we'd better figure out a way to get on it rather than be run over by it. We developed comments to the USAIP and laid out several points that I'll reiterate today. Some of those are redundant to some of the things that have been said, but I think worth saying again.

Whatever you do has to be practical and cost-effective. The economics of the industry have to be foremost in whatever we do here, because if we're not here it doesn't matter if we've got disease or not. If this is gonna be federally mandated, there'd better be some federal funding to go along with it, with those economics in mind.

We too believe the protection of privacy and proprietary rights is extremely important. On the topic of governments, with all due respect to some of the previous speakers, it's the position of New Mexico Cattle Growers that governments stay within the state. In New Mexico's case, we have a Livestock Board that has been here for 116 or 17 years who has the capacity and ability to do this. I'm sure that in other states if there's not a similar livestock board, there's a Department of Agriculture. We feel like federal agencies should only have access to this information in an animal health emergency.

We hope to see--and it looks like from Valerie's presentation today that you're looking at ways to utilize current systems and integrate them in. We're very proud of our brand system. We're very proud of our brand inspectors, and we believe that this covers that very well.

We also are very concerned about the limited liability to producers and the trace-back for food-borne illness. And finally, we believe that if we have to go through all of this rigamarole that we ought to have country of origin labeling to go along with it. I know that's a topic that we differ on, but some of the biggest hurdles to country of origin labeling has been an Animal ID system, and if we're gonna have one, then we think that it ought to serve dual purposes.

I was a little concerned with the birth information that Valerie told us about today. I guess that's the first time I paid enough attention to see that out of that. As you drove across

New Mexico this afternoon, I think you saw the wide open spaces, and there's no way that we can give you a birth date. We might give you a birth quarter. I think we can give a birth year. So, as you look at that, we sure hope you can cover that.

We are very excited about your initial implementation and cooperative agreements. We're working with a tri-national consortium, which we think will be a very different proposal that you'll get. I know that it went in yesterday, but we've coalesced with Mexico and some of the Indian nations as well as other states, and we're very excited about that proposal and we hope that you'll look at it real hard.

Finally, as you know, most of our sheepherders are in Ruiodoso finishing up a convention, and they asked me to point out that they feel like their scrapie system has got a numbering system in place and that that covers the sheep industry, that they're probably way ahead of everybody else. So, with that, I thank you for your time.

MR. TUCK: Thank you, Ms. Cowan. Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: Hi. My name is Sam Houston, and sorry I'm up here without notes, but I wasn't aware that I could make comments. I was coming to listen. And I agree with everybody that has been up here, including you folks that have been up here, with what has been happening, and I agree with Ms. Cowan that the train has probably left for a destination yet unknown to us but is coming down the track. And now it's whether we stand on the side and watch it go by, get on the train and go for the ride, or stand in the track and get run over.

Some of the things that I would like to see is premise ID, who in the world is going to decide that? Are we gonna stand out with a GPS or whatever? There's all kinds of groups, as

you folks have seen, gathering up to try to do the National ID and to do all the premises. I also am on a board putting together a consulting group to look at various programs and computer set-ups for people to help the producers. I grew up on a ranch, and so I understand that side of it.

I also understand technology, and I think it could work tremendously well for this industry. It also could have a whole lot of headaches, and some of the headaches could be cured by figuring out where we're going from the beginning.

As I've tried to talk to Mr. Domenici's office on several occasions, I get nothing from that. I get nothing from Mr. Pearce's office also. And I don't know if it's just that no one wants to take the forefront and say what their opinion is, because there always is an election year coming up. But I still would like for someone to start looking at this as a standpoint of, there are some dates out there, and Valerie, you said that those dates are not that important if somebody's telling you next year. My understanding is Governor Ridge, former Governor Ridge, does have some power in deciding some of the things to protect the borders of the United States, and part of his saying is that if we don't get on board with part of this that he'll make mandates that we can't use federally funded highways. Well, in New Mexico that means just about any highway, and that doesn't necessarily mean that they're black. Some gravel roads are considered state highways, federally mandated stuff in them. So I would say that we probably need to look at the dates kinda hard.

And I would like to have someplace where the USAIP, USDA, all the parts and pieces of all these things, a couple of places that we could go to look for the information. I looked at all kinds of websites. I try to do like with Micro Beef and the dairy association, look at their websites, trying to find information. And the information that I find sometimes is so old because

everything is not updated. You guys said this will be on your website next week, and I hope that is true because I'd like to go back over what everybody said and look at that, and laugh at probably what I said and think, "Dang, I should have said this instead of that."

And just look at it from the fact that from the first gentleman that got up here, those people are right because they believe they're right. It doesn't matter if the rest of us don't agree with them; he has every right to be as defiant as he was. The other people that say, "Yeah, the train's coming, we want to get on and help," remember, we're all in this same work, and therefore, let's try to make something that's appeasable to us all. And with that, I thank you very much for your time.

MR. TUCK: Thank you, Mr. Houston. That concludes our speakers.

MR. HAWKS: In keeping with the way that we have been doing these, I will go through and address some of the issues, and then Valerie will probably get into much more detail. And with regard to the first speaker and the last speaker's comments about everybody has a right to voice their opinions, that's exactly the reason we're here, to hear all of those comments regardless of whether we agree with them, whether we disagree with them. We want to hear those comments. And so we certainly do live in a free country where that is a cherished right, and so we certainly recognize that.

With regard to some of the jurisdictional issues that you raised, I think--we work very closely with the states. We do work with a lot of state authority in a lot of these animal health issues. With regard to some of the maybe off-topic issues, I probably shouldn't address them, but I will. With regard to the 100 percent testing issue for BSE with Japan, Japan just this last week

said that they were backing away from 100 percent testing in their own country. So they're in that process, which is really--really is not that relevant to this discussion and where we're going.

With regard to who will be doing this, what agency will be doing that, a couple of the speakers mentioned FSA. We are working with the state animal health officials in this project. It's an ongoing type of working relationship. It has been in existence for a long period of time.

You know--and I don't intend to try to go through and address each point by point; I'll do it more generally. The comments about this system needing to be used for animal disease, that is absolutely, teetotally, the only issue that we are concerned with is animal disease. The question of confidentiality is one that we are absolutely, teetotally, committed to address. We have those same concerns that you do.

We have the same concern about cost. We want to make sure that anything that we develop is cost-effective, is workable. That's the reason that we're going through this process. We're doing these listening sessions, we're doing these cooperative agreements, to make sure that the system that we ultimately come up with is one that will not add undue cost for the government or for the producer.

We want these systems--one of the speakers talked about the information that they were obtaining. It's important that we be able to get our little bits and pieces of information that we need while at the same time the producers are getting the information that they need for management practices or for marketing as well.

So I think we're really--you know, when I try to summarize the comments that were made here today, I think we're really all on the same wavelength. We're all headed the same direction, and we will get there. There is absolutely no question.

One of the speakers wanted to know, "When will this start?" And there was a comment about some producer that was ready to sell out because they didn't think that, you know, they wanted to be involved in this. You know, that is the last thing we at USDA would ever want to see. We think--you know, we think that we've got to do everything we can to make this system work for all of us, because you are the people that are going to be doing it. We need it for our purpose, animal disease management and control.

The issue was raised about foreign cattle coming in here. They're certainly identified now when they come into this country. Another issue talked about is--and I think I want to point it out again, is, as long as that animal--and Valerie used the term, as long as that animal is on the back 40, it really doesn't matter until that animal leaves that premise is when we really need to know when it's--where it's going, that it needs to be identified.

So I think those are some of the things that I picked up out of the comments, and Valerie will go over some of those later, but I always reserve the right to grab the microphone again.

DR. RAGAN: Every time we do these, I always--the questions always point out to me something we forgot to address. And in trying to do this expeditiously and still get the points across, you always miss something, so I appreciate those questions and comments and I'll try to clarify a few things.

One, the premises definition, there was a question or a request, rather, that we be as flexible as we can on that. The way the premises definition is intended to be, that's something we struggled with for a long period of time. How do you define it so it makes sense disease-wise, but at the same time allow the flexibility for the variation in segments of the industry across the country?

The way it is now, and there was one question about, "Please allow producers to have either one premises number or multiple premises numbers depending on their particular situation." And that is actually the way it's intended to be. The premises is intended to be the location where the animals are, and there is a little bit more definition than that, but that's basically what it is, with the intent being that we would need to know which animals are the animals of concern if the disease were traced back to that premises.

That being said, if the producer owns, say, five or six different locations, pastures or unique entities, the decision on whether there should be one or multiple numbers should be made on how that operation is managed, and it is actually in there that it would be made by the state animal health authorities in consultation with the producer. And the decision, again, the thought process should be made on what would you do if there were a disease outbreak?

Again, that's what we keep going back to. If, for example, there are five or six different premises and the animals constantly move among those premises, commingle with each other, you know, just keep changing pastures or whatever, then it makes sense to have essentially one number.

And what we would do is, potentially--there are some options, but one of the options would be to have one number, and in the record have down where the other locations are so you

wouldn't have to record every time they moved from pasture to pasture. The reason being, if there were a disease outbreak and those animals, even if they're on different pastures, would essentially be considered one herd and we'd need to look at all of them.

On the other hand, if a producer owns a commercial herd and a purebred herd and they're managed completely separately with different--the animals don't commingle, they have different records, et cetera, it may make sense in that case to have two different numbers, one for the commercial operation and one for the purebred operation, so that if the disease were traced back, let's say, to the commercial operation, we wouldn't necessarily need to bother with the purebred operation.

So those types of decisions should be made and are intended to be made based on the--the individual operations and how they work and what would we need to do in case of a disease outbreak situation.

A couple of other points. I appreciate the comments on FSA and their role, and I appreciate also the opportunity for--or the offer, rather, for FSA to have a role. One of the things the producer groups are looking at is, what is the best way to implement this out in the field? And that's looking at a number of different options, such as FSA, Extension, veterinarians, those people who are out there working with cattle every day. And these are logically who should be involved and certainly would be welcome to be involved in participating and helping to actually administrate the system.

On the other hand, when you talk about who's gonna actually do it, there are actually two parts to that. One is, who's gonna do the implementation in the field, and that would be a collaborative/ cooperative effort with a lot of different folks who could potentially assist in that

manner. On the other hand, as far as the administration for disease purposes, that's intended to stay with USDA Veterinary Services in cooperation with state partners, because we're a disease eradication agency, so we would need that data to basically do disease eradication efforts.

But that's not to say--and I do want to clarify also that this would not be just a USDA thing. We have always done disease eradication program efforts in cooperation with state animal health authorities. This is historically the way we've done disease eradication programs, and that's certainly the intent with the Animal ID programs as well. We intend to cooperate and continue working in that direction, and we have quite a number of state animal health authorities and representatives of livestock boards working on this effort with us.

It's not intended to be USDA running the whole show. It is a cooperative effort. Most of what we do in the states is done, as Mr. Hawks said, under state authority, and that is the way we would continue to work, so it is intended to be a cooperative effort.

There are several comments on the brand system and also on disease eradication programs, scrapie in sheep, which also has--already has an ID system. Again, species working groups do recognize the brand system is out here in the west, and we've heard that message loud and clear. And when I say "we," again, I mean a collective "we," all of us who have been working on this effort, not just government.

So that is very definitely one of the things that is being discussed by the cattle groups is, how can we and to what extent can we incorporate the brand systems that are currently out there? We know the brand infrastructure. We know that that's a system that's been out there for a long period of time. We're not gonna dictate how to do that. We're asking the cattle working

groups to help in deciding the best way to incorporate the brands in the brand system, and also the scrapie systems out there.

There is a sheep and a goat working group who obviously are taking a good, hard look at how can the scrapie system be integrated into this system? So the intent is not to go out there and wholeheartedly replace all the systems that have been out there, but rather to figure out, do we need to modify? Can we use them as are? How can we best integrate them in there and grandfather them over time, even if it's in an evolutionary process, to go into a national standardized system?

A couple of comments about the importance of the education process, and also a couple of questions along the same lines of the concerns of producers about the technology--the confusion or the concern of the technological aspect of it, and I certainly understand that. I think we all realize--and again, I apologize for not being very, very clear on that.

But the infrastructure and the framework is set up so that we can track animals electronically. But also in the implementation details is, how can we best do that in the field? The intent is not to make every producer have to buy a scanner or have to buy electronic tags, but to rather--have some discussions on possibly having tagging stations or--there are a number of other technologies that can be used. There are a number of representatives of those technologies who can be used.

You heard a comment from Ms. Mayfield about how she's working to help to work on--helping to get some of these systems in place. So the intent is to allow those activities to continue, to try to do our best so if a producer has five animals, for example, we don't want him to have to buy the scanner. If they can just record the number and take it someplace else and

have somebody else send that in for them, so be it. There's also a marketing processor group, and the markets, livestock markets, are looking at, what is their role? How can they best assist? What are they willing to do, what are they not willing to do in that role as well?

So, with that being said, I think it's what we--as Mr. Hawks said, the last thing we want to do is to drive anybody out of business. Along the same lines, education process is critical, and of this initial money that we have, \$3 million of that is intended to help with the education process and the understanding and the communication effort and the outreach efforts, to make sure we're all moving together on the same page forward as we continue the implementation of that.

Caren, I really appreciate you bringing up the birth date thing, because this is the one time I kinda skimmed over that and this is the one time I probably shouldn't have. We have birth up there, and I don't know--I think on the slide it says date or quarter or year, whatever.

The original--when BSE was found, there was a lot of discussion about, "Well, we have to have a birth date." My background is working on the large ranches in south Florida where we had 12,000 to 20,000 brood cows and got them up once a year to pull the calves off. So I remember clearly a discussion in D.C. where I said, "Well, if we have to have an exact date, we're gonna get laughed off the farm." So that discussion has occurred.

On the other hand, there are--the age of an animal is very important. There are some farms that have a few animals, and they know exactly when each calf was born, and if we can capture that information, that would be ideal. On the other hand, if we can only get quarter, year, whatever, we're gonna get whatever we can get that's reasonable. So thank you for making me clarify that.

There was a date for implementation comment, and I think I was not clear on that as well. It's not that there--the date is not important; the dates are obviously very important. But at this stage, we don't have a defined date that anything is gonna be required by this date. We're too early in the process. We're still building a system. We want to do some field trials and learn from that as to what we're gonna be putting in place and how long it may take to do that. We'll be refining the dates as they go on down, and as we learn a little bit, but we're too early in the process right now to put clear-cut dates where people are gonna have to do something by such-and-such a date.

The reason I mentioned "don't panic" is because the U.S. Animal Identification Plan that's been out for a while had a proposed date in there of having--all animals needed to be tagged or identified. I think it was by July, 2005, and a lot of people were really worrying about the fact that they had to have everything in place for all animals by that date. What we want to say is, let's step back. We are building this. We will have some more refinement on when we expect things to be in place. We're just a little early in the process for that right now.

There was also a question--and I apologize, there was a slide, and I think I missed it on this one. There is a slide, and I usually leave it up there. It's on the other CD, I'm afraid, so I'll have to get that one and load it on here.

But for the gentleman who wanted additional information, there is on the USDA website already, there is quite a bit of information, including the postings of all the listening sessions up to this point. This one will be posted in two days, about Tuesday. We are continuing to post them. It also has links to the US Animal Identification Plan website where the plans have all been posted. There is a question and answer session in there. A lot of information is posted.

The USDA website is www.aphis.usda.gov. And you'll be able to find Animal Identification in there. I think it's under Hot Issues, and then it will go to Animal Identification. It has a number of links as well as all the transcribing from all of the previous listening sessions and we will continue to post them there.

With that, Mr. Hawks, that's all.

MR. HAWKS: Very good. With regard to the dates as well I think we need to continue to remind everyone that this is a voluntary system, that we're talking about these dates, even if they exist, there's certainly not anything mandatory, there's certainly not anything that would cause anyone to be out of business as a result of not meeting a date. We do have targets, just like we are targeting the first of August to be able to actually do those premises numbers, to allocate those premises numbers. But we're talking about a voluntary system. It will certainly be voluntary for the time being. So I think that's something that we need to keep in mind.

And as far as education goes, there needs to be a lot of education in the countryside, but there also needs to be a lot of education for us as well. These listening sessions are serving that purpose. With that, I would like to say once again thank you for your participation here. It certainly helps us to know what your concerns are, what your issues are, so that we can deal with them in a manner that will be acceptable to all of us. Thank you.

(The listening session concluded at 4:43 p.m.)